

University of Groningen

## Intergenerational Contact and the Life Course Status of Young Adult Children

Bucx, Freek; Wel, Frits van; Knijn, Trudie; Hagendoorn, Louk

*Published in:*  
Journal of Marriage and Family

*DOI:*  
[10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00467.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00467.x)

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2008

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Bucx, F., Wel, F. V., Knijn, T., & Hagendoorn, L. (2008). Intergenerational Contact and the Life Course Status of Young Adult Children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(1), 144. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00467.x>

**Copyright**

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

**Take-down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

*Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.*

## Intergenerational Contact and the Life Course Status of Young Adult Children

*This study examined how the life course status of young adults—whether they have a romantic partner and whether they have children—is related to how often they have contact with their parents. Hypotheses were tested using recent data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study. The main sample included 1,911 young adults between the ages of 18 and 34. Results suggest that young adults' entrance into cohabitation and marriage is associated with less face-to-face contact with parents. Young adults with children of their own tend to see their parents more frequently than young adults without offspring. Findings are congruent with the family life course perspective, contending that family relationships are related to the life course status of individual family members.*

Young adulthood is the life course phase in which romantic relationships and family formation are typically initiated. Classic functionalist family theories (Parsons, 1954) suggest that it is through these transitions that children and their parents separate and go on to live independent lives. Research, however, has revealed little support for a strict interpretation of this *separation thesis* (Mancini & Blieszner, 1989): Parents and young adults typically remain involved in each other's lives after the latter have left the parental

residence (Litwak, 1960; Lye, 1996; Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997).

Nevertheless, it is plausible that the specific life course status of young adults—whether they are involved in a romantic relationship and whether they have children—affects parent-child interactions, albeit in a less radical way. The *family life course perspective* (Elder, 1994; MacMillan & Copher, 2005) suggests that the relationship between parents and children remains important throughout the life course, but that changes in the lives of children and parents have consequences for their interactions. Research on the relationship between the young adult's life course and parent-child contact is, however, relatively scarce, with some notable exceptions (Aquilino, 1997; Fischer, 1981, 1983).

The present study considers the relationship between a young adult's life course status and the frequency of contact with parents. The main focus is face-to-face contact, although contacts by telephone, regular mail, and e-mail are also considered. Contact may be initiated for reasons of companionship as well as for exchange of support and information on each other's lives (Mancini & Blieszner, 1989). Research suggests that the frequency of contact between parents and children offers a good indirect measure of *intergenerational solidarity* (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Kalmijn, 2006) as well as a good overall indicator of the strength of the parent-child relationship (Lye, Klepinger, Hyle, & Nelson, 1995).

### RESEARCH GOALS

The first aim of this study is to examine how the young adult's life course status is related to

---

Department of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, Utrecht University, P.O. Box 80140, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands (f.bucx@uu.nl).

*Key Words:* intergenerational relations, life course theory, multinomial regression, youth/emergent adulthood.

intergenerational contact, as prior research in this domain has yielded contradictory findings. Some studies (Fischer, 1981, 1983) have shown parenthood to be positively related to frequency of contact between daughter and mother and negatively related to contact between son and mother, whereas in others (Aquilino, 1997) no relationships were observed. Aquilino found marriage and cohabitation to increase the frequency of parent-child interactions; no such relationships were observed by Fischer (1981).

The second main objective of this study is to provide new insight into mechanisms underlying the relationship between life course status and intergenerational contact. The family life course perspective offers theoretical arguments regarding how involvement in a partnership and having children may affect interactions with parents.

We use information from a sample of 1,911 young adults (aged 18 to 34 years) who participated in a recent large-scale study on family relations in The Netherlands. Like most other Western countries, The Netherlands has been characterized in recent decades by decreases in marriage and fertility rates and increases in solitary living and cohabitation among young adults. Currently, 17% of all cohabiting couples are not married (Latten, 2004). The current total fertility rate is 1.7; on average, mothers have their first child at the age of 29 (Central Bureau of Statistics Netherlands, n.d.). The Netherlands has a relatively high-density population: More than 50% of adults and their parents live within 20 kilometers (= 12 miles) of each other (Kalmijn, 2006). The frequency of intergenerational contact in The Netherlands is similar to that in other Western European countries (Germany, Great Britain) and somewhat higher than in the United States (Kalmijn, 2006).

#### THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The family life course perspective (Elder, 1994) has inspired a considerable amount of research on family relations. One of its main premises is that individuals acquire or lose social roles and role positions in the domains of work and family as they develop across the life span (MacMillan & Copher, 2005). Changes in roles and positions are indicated by specific life course transitions. The family life course perspective includes the concept of *linked lives* (Elder, 1994): Family relationships change in response to the individual developmental paths of family members, and

changes in family interactions affect individual family members' lives. Research has shown that life course transitions, such as marriage (Aquilino, 1997; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998), as well as transitions experienced by one's parents, such as divorce (Aquilino, 1994), affect one's relationship with parents.

In sum, the family life course perspective suggests that the relationship between children and their parents remains salient throughout the life course, but that this relationship is affected by the life course status of individual family members. Using these principles as a general framework, we consider more specifically how a young adult's entrance into partnership and parenthood affects the frequency of intergenerational contact.

Young adult's transitions to partnership and parenthood generally increase the size of the family network. When young adults enter into a romantic relationship, the family networks of young adults and their parents expand to include not only the new partner, but also the partner's family. In the case of parenthood, a new family member is born. When entering into partnership, young adults assume the roles of romantic partner and son-in-law or daughter-in-law, whereas their parents become parents-in-law. Entrance into parenthood entails adoption of the parental role; the young adult's parents acquire the grandparent role.

As the size of the family network increases, the young adult's social resources within the family are likely to increase. The adoption of additional roles, however, could also decrease time available for specific family relationships. Moreover, both young adults and their parents may experience an increased or decreased need for contact as a result of life events. Below, we use the concepts of opportunities, resources, and needs in a heuristic way to formulate our hypotheses.

#### PARTNERSHIP STATUS

Having a partner leads individuals to become embedded in a larger social network including not only their own family and friends, but also those of their partner. Parents compete for their children's limited time with a larger network of social actors (most notably parents-in-law, who fulfill a more or less comparable role). Because visiting family appears to be an activity that couples generally do together (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001), the division of attention over both families

further reduces time available for contact with each family. Research suggests that parents-in-law can play an important role: Married men have less contact with their own parents when their parents-in-law live relatively nearby (Lee, Spitze, & Logan, 2003).

Other arguments for predicting negative effects of having a partner focus on the role of the partner in mediating contact with parents. Especially when it is assumed that visiting family is an activity that couples tend to engage in together (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001), frequency of parent-child contact may be influenced by both the child's and the partner's sentiments. Children-in-law may experience conflicts and adjustment problems with their parents-in-law, as is the subject of popular stereotypes, leading them to draw partners away from their parents. Such negative sentiments can make interactions between young adults and their parents less rewarding, reducing the likelihood of future contacts.

In conclusion, we expect young adults with a partner to have less contact with parents than single young adults (Hypothesis 1.1). Our analyses distinguish between young adults who live with a partner and those who are dating. It seems reasonable to argue that when couples start to live together, the number of shared activities—including family contacts—increases; hence, the role of parents-in-law and the partner's influence may become more prominent. We further discriminate between cohabiting and married young adults: Unmarried cohabiting individuals are assumed to have fewer shared (family) activities, spending more leisure time without their partner compared to married people (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001).

Additionally, we test hypotheses regarding underlying mechanisms. Specifically, we hypothesize that young adults have less contact with their own parents when they have better relationships with their parents-in-law (Hypothesis 1.2). Furthermore, we expect less parental contact when partners report a good relationship with their own parents (Hypothesis 1.3) and more contact when partners report a positive relationship with their parents-in-law (i.e., the respondent's parents) (Hypothesis 1.4).

#### PARENTHOOD STATUS

Young adults' entrance into parenthood can lead to a variety of changes. On the one hand, parenting may limit a young adult's opportunity to

invest time in relationships with parents. On the other hand, frequency of contact may increase, as a new birth creates benefits of intergenerational contact for both sides. The grandparent role is associated with behavioral expectations such as visiting grandchildren and providing child care (Aldous, 1995). Moreover, grandparents can be expected to enjoy seeing their grandchildren, which can lead to increased contact with their children as a by-product. For young adults, grandparents' provision of child care may be a financially attractive alternative to professional child care.

For both parents and young adults, we expect the benefits of contact to prevail. As such, we hypothesize that young adults with children have more contact with their parents than young adults without children (Hypothesis 2.1). We test whether this relationship is related to the age of grandchildren, as benefits of contact are especially high when grandchildren are relatively young and grandparents can fulfill a caretaking role. Regarding underlying mechanisms, we expect contact frequency to be positively related to grandparents' provision of child care (Hypothesis 2.2) and negatively related to reliance on paid child care (Hypothesis 2.3).

#### CONTROL VARIABLES

We controlled for age because younger people tend to have more contact with their parents than older people (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1992). We adjusted for family size because people with more siblings tend to have less contact with parents (Logan & Spitze, 1996). We also adjusted for prior divorce of the young adult, as divorce generally decreases contact with parents (Kalmijn, 2007). We also controlled for the level of education of the young adult and of parents (Kalmijn, 2006) and for parents' marital status (Aquilino, 1994; Kalmijn, 2007). Furthermore, geographic proximity (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Rossi & Rossi, 1990) was included in our analyses, because proximity facilitates contact; this variable was also used to represent whether young adults lived with their parents. In analyses of underlying mechanisms of partnership status, we controlled for quality of the relationship between respondents and their own parents: It is plausible that quality of the respondent's relationship with parents-in-law and quality of the partner's relationship with both sets of parents are related to how respondents view the relationship

with their own parents; hence, controlling for the latter variable is necessary if effects of different intergenerational relationships are to be distinguished.

## METHOD

### *Data*

The data in this study were drawn from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (Dykstra et al., 2005), a large-scale study of family relations in a random address sample of 8,161 adults aged 18 to 79 and residing in private households in The Netherlands. To date, only data from the first wave of this panel study are available; the data were collected between 2002 and 2004. Information was obtained through computer-assisted personal interviews. The overall response rate was 45%, which is about average for family studies in The Netherlands (see Dykstra et al.). In recent years, response rates in household surveys have decreased sharply. Response rates are generally lower in The Netherlands as compared to other countries (De Leeuw & De Heer, 2002); Dutch people seem to be particularly careful about revealing personal information.

From this total sample, we selected all individuals between 18 and 34 years old (25.2% of the total sample) with at least one (biological) parent living in The Netherlands (92.9% of the young adult sample). We excluded parent-child dyads in which parents lived abroad, as this situation introduces unusual constraints for intergenerational contact. The resulting sample—referred to as the *anchor* sample—included 1,911 young adults (757 men, 1,154 women), 1,832 with a living mother and 1,662 with a living father. In 1,589 cases (83.2%), both parents were alive.

The anchor sample was used to investigate the relationship between partnership and parenthood status and the frequency of intergenerational contact. For the analysis of underlying mechanisms associated with partnership and parenthood status, specific subsamples of this main anchor sample were used. For the analysis of mechanisms of partnership status, we included those anchor respondents who were involved in a romantic relationship, whether dating, cohabiting, or married (68.6%,  $n = 1,310$ ). For the analysis of mechanisms of parenthood status, we selected anchor respondents with children (30.9%,  $n = 591$ ).

To test hypotheses concerning mediation of parental contact by the partner, we used an addi-

tional sample of young adults, namely the partners of anchor respondents who were in the relevant life course period and who had completed a questionnaire. If anchor respondents had given permission, a questionnaire was left behind for their partner. Among all eligible partners, the overall response rate was 71.6%. This group is referred to as the *alter* respondents. For this alter sample, we had the necessary information to test our hypotheses about the mediating influence of the partner, namely information about how anchors experienced the relationship with their parents and parents-in-law.

The alter sample included all alter respondents between 18 and 34 years old (20.2% of the total alter sample) with at least one (biological) parent living in The Netherlands (93.5% of the young adult sample). Our final alter sample included 794 young adults (376 men, 418 women), 759 with a living mother and 716 with a living father. In the case of 681 alter respondents (85.8%), both parents were alive.

This alter sample was used to assess the partner's influence on the frequency of intergenerational contact. For these analyses, contact with parents of the alter respondent was the dependent variable. We considered relationships with characteristics of the alter respondents and their partners (i.e., the anchor respondents). In other words, these analyses considered a totally different sample of parent-child dyads, although the young adults in this sample were related to the respondents in the original anchor sample via romantic relationships. Descriptive analyses (not reported here) indicated that the sample of alter respondents did not substantially differ from the main anchor sample on important characteristics, except that all alter respondents—by definition—had a partner (namely, the anchor respondent).

### *Measures*

The two *dependent variables* were ordinal-level measures of (a) frequency of face-to-face contact and (b) frequency of telephone, regular mail or e-mail contact, or a combination between young adults and their parents. For *frequency of face-to-face contact*, respondents answered the following question: "How many times have you seen your mother in the past twelve months?" The same question was asked for contact with father. The originally seven answer categories were recoded into three groups: 1 = *less than weekly*, 2 = *less than daily but at least*

once a week, 3 = daily contact. People living with parents were not explicitly asked these questions; instead, they were assigned to the highest category, as in this case daily contact was plausible (see also Tomassini et al., 2004).

*Frequency of telephone or (e-)mail contact or both* was measured by asking respondents: "How many times have you had contact with your mother by telephone and/or (e-)mail in the past twelve months?" The same question was asked for contact with father. Again, the originally seven answer categories were recoded into three groups: 1 = less than weekly, 2 = less than daily but at least once a week, 3 = daily contact.

*Independent variables.* Concerning the child's life course status, the following variables were computed. To represent *partnership status*, four categories of young adults were defined: (a) single, (b) in a dating relationship, (c) cohabiting, and (d) married. Concerning *parenthood status*, four categories of young adults were constructed: (a) no children in the household, (b) youngest child less than 2 years old, (c) youngest child 2 years or older but younger than 6 years, and (d) youngest child aged 6 or older.

To enable investigation of underlying mechanisms of partnership status, the following variables were assessed. The *quality of the relationship with parent(s)-in-law* was measured with the question: "How do you judge the overall quality of your relationship with your parent(s)-in-law?" Answers were given on a 4-point scale, ranging from 0 = poor to 3 = very good. For analyses of the mediating influence of the partner, measures of the *quality of partner's relationship with own parent(s)* and *with respondent's parent(s)* were included. Partners were asked to judge the overall quality of their relationships with their own parent(s), with the respondent's mother, and with the respondent's father. Answers were on a 4-point scale, ranging from 0 = poor to 3 = very good.

For investigating mechanisms of parenthood status, the following variables were used. To assess *provision of child care by grandparent(s)*, respondents were asked how often their mother and father had provided child care during the past 3 months. Answer categories were: 0 = not at all, 1 = a few times, 2 = several times. Use of paid child care was represented by a dummy variable (0 = no, 1 = yes).

*Control variables.* Respondents reported on their own and their parents' level of *education*. To construct an appropriate interval scale, we applied a standard recoding procedure (De Graaf, De Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000) whereby the original categories were transformed into new categories defined by the approximate number of years of education completed. The resulting variable ranged from 6 = completion of elementary school but not secondary or vocational education to 21 = completion of postgraduate education.

*Geographic proximity* was represented as the geographic distance (in kilometers) between the parent's and the child's place of residence; for young adults living in the parental home, a distance of 0 was assigned. On average, the young adult respondents (main anchor sample) lived about 22 kilometers (= 13.75 miles) from their parents (i.e., a 30-minute drive).

*Quality of relationship with parent(s)* was measured by asking respondents to assess the overall quality of relationships with their mother and their father. Answers were on a 4-point scale, ranging from 0 = poor to 3 = very good.

The young adult's *age* (in years) and *gender* (0 = male, 1 = female) were included, as was *number of living siblings*. Young adult's *prior divorce* indicated whether respondents were ever divorced in the past (0 = no, 1 = yes), regardless of their current partnership status. *Parents' marital status* was defined as: (a) parents living together, (b) separated or divorced parents, currently single, (c) separated or divorced parents, currently remarried, (d) widowed parents, currently single, (e) widowed parents, currently remarried. Our analyses did not control for *age of the parent*, in view of high correlations between this variable and child's age.

For the (main) anchor sample, means and standard deviations for the independent and control variables are presented in Table 1. Frequencies of missing data were low (ranging from 0 to 2%).

In the alter sample, rates of missing data were generally low (ranging from 0 to 4%), except in the case of parents' education (for mother, 11% missing; for father, 12% missing). The relatively large number of missing values for parents' education may be attributable to the fact that this information was not provided by the parents' own children (i.e., the alters), but instead by the partners of their children (i.e., the anchors).

Table 1. Descriptive Information on Child and Parent Characteristics (Main Anchor Sample)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Child's characteristics ( <i>N</i> = 1,911 <sup>a</sup> )		
Age (years)	26.57	5.06
Gender		
Male	.50	
Female	.50	
<i>N</i> of living siblings	2.06	1.67
Education (years)	12.65	2.75
Prior divorce (1 = yes)	.03	
Partnership status		
Single	.38	
Dating	.16	
Cohabiting	.21	
Married	.25	
Parenthood status		
Have no children	.75	
Youngest < 2 years old	.10	
Youngest 2 – 6 years old	.12	
Youngest ≥ 6 years old	.03	
Parents living		
Both	.88	
Only mother	.09	
Only father	.03	
Mother's characteristics ( <i>N</i> = 1,832 <sup>a</sup> )		
Age (years)	54.29	7.00
Education (years)	10.64	2.92
Marital status		
Live with child's father	.76	
Divorced, single	.09	
Divorced, remarried	.06	
Widowed, single	.07	
Widowed, remarried	.02	
Proximity (km)	21.90	40.29
Father's characteristics ( <i>N</i> = 1,662 <sup>a</sup> )		
Age (years)	56.51	7.11
Education (years)	11.51	3.58
Marital status		
Live with child's mother	.82	
Divorced, single	.07	
Divorced, remarried	.08	
Widowed, single	.02	
Widowed, remarried	.02	
Proximity (km)	22.59	41.17

Note: *SDs* are given for continuous variables only. Data are weighted.

<sup>a</sup>Unweighted.

In these instances, mean substitution was used and a dummy variable (indicating whether this variable was missing, with 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*) was included in the analyses.

## Method of Analysis

Findings are reported in three major steps. First, we briefly offer descriptive information on frequency of intergenerational contact in the anchor sample. Second, we tested hypotheses concerning the relationship between partnership and parenthood status and frequency of contact. Because the data set contained cross-sectional information, we inferred effects of life course transitions from comparisons between young adults differing in their life course status. Finally, we tested hypotheses about underlying mechanisms of partnership and parenthood status with specific subsamples (for more information on these subsamples, see *Data*). For the analyses of telephone and (e-)mail contact, we excluded young adults living with parents.

The original sample was a household (address) sample; in the descriptive and regression analyses, we corrected for the sample design and converted it into a sample representative of individuals by using the number of household members as a weight (Winship & Radbill, 1994). Previous analyses revealed that young adult men, young adults living in single households, and young adults living with parents were underrepresented; in the descriptive analyses, we used weights to adjust our sample of young adults to the gender and household composition of the Dutch population of young adults.

Taking into consideration the nature of our dependent variables and following practice in previous research (e.g., Hank, 2007), we estimated multinomial logistic regression models to investigate the relationship between the independent variables and our three categories of contact frequency. *Relative risk ratios (rrr)* are reported, representing the likelihood that an observation falls into the comparison category rather than the baseline category. Risk ratios higher than 1 indicate that the comparison category is more likely than the baseline category. In all models, the baseline category is *daily contact*; the comparison categories are respectively *less than daily* but at least once a week and *less than weekly*.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Results

Analyses revealed that 29.5% of the young adults currently lived with their parent(s); their mean age was 21 years (*M* = 21.30, *SD* = 3.13). For young adults living independently, 7.5% had

daily face-to-face contact with their mother, 51.3% saw their mother less than daily but at least once a week, and 41.2% saw their mother less than weekly. For young adults living independently, 4.9% saw their father on a daily basis, 48.8% had face-to-face contact with their father less than daily but at least weekly, and 46.3% saw their father less than weekly.

Concerning telephone and (e-)mail contact, 10.1% of young adults had daily contact with their mother, 61.1% spoke with or (e-)mailed to their mother less than daily but at least once a week, whereas 28.8% had phone or (e-)mail

contact with their mother less than weekly. Furthermore, 4.1% of young adults had daily telephone or (e-)mail contact with their father, 47.8% spoke or (e-)mailed with their father less than daily but at least once a week, whereas 48.1% had phone or (e-)mail contact with their father less than weekly.

Life Course Status and  
Intergenerational Contact

Regression analyses of face-to-face contact are presented in Tables 2 – 4; results concerning

Table 2. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results for Frequency of Face-to-Face Contact Between Young Adults and Their Parents

	Daily Contact With Mother		Daily Contact With Father	
	≥ Once a Week	< Weekly	≥ Once a Week	< Weekly
Child's characteristics				
Age (years)	1.25*** (.03)	1.33*** (.04)	1.25*** (.03)	1.33*** (.04)
Gender (1 = female)	.75 (.22)	.50** (.26)	1.37 (.25)	1.18 (.29)
N of living siblings	1.01 (.06)	1.18* (.07)	1.07 (.07)	1.27** (.08)
Education (years)	1.09* (.04)	1.23*** (.05)	1.03 (.05)	1.11 (.06)
Prior divorce (1 = yes)	.83 (.48)	.82 (.61)	.71 (.63)	.96 (.74)
Parent's characteristics				
Education (years)	1.07 (.04)	1.09 (.05)	1.04 (.04)	1.08 (.04)
Proximity (log of km)	8.13*** (.17)	22.58*** (.18)	13.66*** (.24)	36.43*** (.25)
Marital status				
Live with other parent <sup>a</sup>				
Divorced, single	1.61 (.39)	2.98* (.45)	1.46 (.27)	2.79*** (.30)
Divorced, remarried	.99 (.15)	1.15 (.17)	.95 (.19)	1.61* (.20)
Widowed, single	.83* (.09)	.87 (.11)	.83 (.25)	.92 (.27)
Widowed, remarried	1.03 (.13)	.99 (.16)	1.45 (.23)	1.74* (.25)
Child's life course status				
Partnership status				
Single <sup>a</sup>				
Dating	1.13 (.31)	.97 (.42)	1.11 (.36)	1.12 (.46)
Cohabiting	5.35*** (.30)	5.65*** (.36)	12.52*** (.40)	12.87*** (.45)
Married	5.53*** (.35)	5.03*** (.42)	5.89*** (.46)	4.98** (.51)
Parenthood status				
Have no children <sup>a</sup>				
Youngest < 2 years old	.55 (.37)	.26** (.43)	.50 (.47)	.37* (.52)
Youngest 2 – 6 years old	.33** (.35)	.20*** (.41)	.28** (.46)	.23** (.51)
Youngest ≥ 6 years old	.45 (.49)	.64 (.60)	.88 (.70)	.93 (.79)
R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	.68		.70	
% Daily contact	34.8		34.7	
N (unweighted)	1,773		1,623	

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is *daily contact*; comparison categories are *≥ once a week* respectively *< weekly*. Data are weighted.

<sup>a</sup>Reference category.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001 (two-tailed).



Table 3. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results for Mechanisms Underlying the Relationship Between Partnership and Parenthood Status and Face-to-Face Contact Between Young Adults and Their Mother

	Anchor Sample With Partner		Alter Sample With Partner		Anchor Sample With Children	
	Daily Contact		Daily Contact		Daily Contact	
	≥ Once a Week	< Weekly	≥ Once a Week	< Weekly	≥ Once a Week	< Weekly
Mechanisms of partnership status						
Quality of relationship with parent(s)-in-law	1.13 (.14)	1.26 (.17)				
Quality of partner's relationship with own parent(s)			1.91** (.22)	2.36*** (.25)		
Quality of partner's relationship with respondent's mother			.52** (.23)	.41*** (.26)		
Mechanisms of parenthood status						
Provision of child care by grandmother					.99 (.23)	.26*** (.30)
Use of paid child care (1 = yes)					1.09 (.36)	2.56* (.46)
R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)		.63		.54		.51
% Daily contact		20.5		14.0		12.6
N (unweighted)		1,182		729		535

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is *daily contact*; comparison categories are *≥ once a week* respectively *< weekly*. Data are weighted. Control variables include young adults' age, gender, number of living siblings, education, prior divorce, and mother's education, geographic proximity, and marital status. When estimating mechanisms of partnership status, we also controlled for the quality of the relationship between young adults and their mother and for young adults' parenthood status.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

telephone and (e-)mail contact are discussed in the text. The results reported in the tables do not differentiate between sons and daughters. Additional analyses for sons and daughters separately revealed generally similar relationships between life course status and face-to-face contact for sons and daughters. For telephone or (e-)mail contact, some differences were observed; in the latter case, results are reported separately for sons and daughters.

Our models controlled for geographic proximity between parents and children. As has been suggested by some authors (e.g., Grundy & Shelton, 2001; Kalmijn, 2007), geographic proximity might not be entirely exogenous to contact: Both proximity and contact appear to be affected by other variables such as level of education (Kalmijn, 2006). Furthermore, young adults' and parents' preferences for contact might influence their decisions to live closer or further away from each other. In that sense, geographic proximity may mediate the relationship between young adults' life course status and frequency

of contact. For this reason, we performed additional analyses in which geographic proximity was omitted. In general, the explained variance in these models was much smaller than in the models including proximity; the estimates of independent variables and significance values, however, were highly similar. Therefore, results from these additional analyses are not reported here.

Table 2 shows the results for face-to-face contact with mother and father. As expected, the probability of having less than daily or less than weekly face-to-face contact increased with young adults' age. Daughters were less likely to see their mother less often than once a week. The probability of having face-to-face contact with parents less than weekly increased with the number of living siblings. More highly educated young adults were more likely to see their mother less than daily or less than weekly. Intergenerational geographic proximity was strongly associated with face-to-face contact: With larger distances, the probability of having less than daily or less than weekly contact increased. Divorced mothers

Table 4. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results for Mechanisms Underlying the Relationship Between Partnership and Parenthood Status and Face-to-Face Contact Between Young Adults and Their Father

	Anchor Sample With Partner		Alter Sample With Partner		Anchor Sample With Children	
	Daily Contact		Daily Contact		Daily Contact	
	≥ Once a Week	< Weekly	≥ Once a Week	< Weekly	≥ Once a Week	< Weekly
Mechanisms of partnership status						
Quality of relationship with parent(s)-in-law	1.13 (.16)	1.18 (.19)				
Quality of partner's relationship with own parent(s)			1.46 (.22)	1.80* (.24)		
Quality of partner's relationship with respondent's father			.64* (.23)	.46** (.24)		
Mechanisms of parenthood status						
Provision of child care by grandfather					.82 (.26)	.30*** (.31)
Use of paid child care (1 = yes)					1.06 (.43)	1.94 (.52)
R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	.64		.51		.50	
% Daily contact	19.8		14.0		8.7	
N (unweighted)	1,087		679		464	

Note: Relative risk ratios (standard errors). Baseline category is *daily contact*; comparison categories are *≥ once a week* respectively *< weekly*. Data are weighted. Control variables include young adults' age, gender, number of living siblings, education, prior divorce, and father's education, geographic proximity, and marital status. When estimating mechanisms of partnership status, we also controlled for the quality of the relationship between young adults and their father and for young adults' parenthood status.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001 (two-tailed).

who lived alone were more likely to see their children less than weekly than mothers who lived together with the child's father; widowed mothers living alone were less likely to see their children less than daily. Divorced fathers, whether currently single or remarried, and widowed fathers who were currently remarried were more likely to see their children less than weekly than fathers who lived with the child's mother.

With regard to young adults' partnership status, both cohabiting and married young adults were more likely than single young adults to see their parents less than daily or less than weekly. No differences were observed between dating and single young adults. No relationships were observed between young adults' partnership status and telephone or (e-)mail contact.

Concerning young adults' parenthood status, young adults with children younger than 2 years old were less likely to see their parents less than once a week than young adults with no children in the household; young adults with children between 2 and 6 years old were less likely to

report less than daily or less than weekly contact. No differences were found between young adults with children aged 6 or older and young adults without children, which suggests that parenthood is associated with more frequent contact with parents only when grandchildren are very young.

Additional analyses of telephone or (e-)mail contact showed that young adult daughters with children younger than 2 years old were less likely to have less than weekly phone or (e-)mail contact with their mother (*rrr* = .36, *p* < .01) than young adult daughters with no children in the household; the same held for daughters with children between 2 and 6 years old (*rrr* = .18, *p* < .001). No differences were found between daughters with children aged 6 years or older and daughters without offspring. We found no relationship between son's parenthood status and telephone or (e-)mail contact with mother. Furthermore, no significant relationships were found between young adults' parenthood status and telephone or (e-)mail contact with father, either for sons or for daughters.

### *Mechanisms Underlying Partnership and Parenthood Status*

To test hypotheses concerning underlying mechanisms of partnership status, we performed regression analyses on two samples of young adults with a partner: the anchor (sub)sample and the alter sample. Regarding parenthood status, underlying mechanisms were studied in an anchor (sub)sample of young adults with children. Results for face-to-face contact are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

#### *Partnership Status*

First, relationships involving the child's contact with parents-in-law are discussed (for Tables 3 and 4, Column 1). We found no evidence that face-to-face contact (with mother or father) is associated with the quality of a young adult's relationship with parents-in-law. Analyses of telephone or (e-)mail contact suggested that the probability of having less than weekly telephone or (e-)mail contact with mother increases if young adults have good relationships with their parents-in-law ( $rrr = 1.54, p < .01$ ); no relationships were found for telephone or (e-)mail contact with father.

The mediating influence of the partner was examined with information from the alter sample (for Tables 3 and 4, Column 2). As hypothesized, the likelihood of having less than daily and less than weekly face-to-face contact with mother was higher when partners reported a good relationship with their own parents. The probability of having less than weekly face-to-face contact with father was higher when partners had a good relationship with their own parents. No such association was found for telephone or (e-)mail contact, either with mother or with father.

Less than daily and less than weekly face-to-face contact with parents was less likely when the respondent's partner had a good relationship with the respondent's parents; this result held for contact with mother as well as father. No such relationships were found for telephone or (e-)mail contact, with either mother or father. These results suggest that the frequency of young adults' face-to-face contact with their parents depends not only on the quality of their own relationship with their parents, but also on the quality of their partner's relationship with their parents (i.e., the partner's parents-in-law).

#### *Parenthood Status*

To test our hypotheses concerning underlying mechanisms of parenthood status, we performed

regression analyses on an anchor (sub)sample of young adults with children (for Tables 3 and 4, Column 3). When grandparents provided child care, young adults were more likely to see their parents at least weekly. Also, telephone or (e-)mail contact with both mother ( $rrr = .35, p < .001$ ) and father ( $rrr = .47, p < .01$ ) was less likely to occur less than once a week when grandparents provided child care. When young adults made use of paid child care, they were less likely to see their mother at least weekly. No relationships were observed between paid child care and face-to-face contact with father, or between paid child care and telephone or (e-)mail contact with either parent.

### DISCUSSION

An important general finding of this study is that the young adults in our sample had frequent contact with their parents, even after they had left the parental home. Slightly more than half of the non-resident young adults reported seeing both their parents at least once a week. Similar frequencies were observed for telephone or (e-)mail contact with father, whereas more than 70% of the young adults spoke with their mother at least weekly via phone or (e-)mail. Similar patterns of intergenerational contact have been observed in Germany (Szydlik, 2000) and Great Britain (Grundy & Shelton, 2001). Face-to-face contact is less frequent in the United States, yet still about 40% of adults see their parents at least once a week (Lye, 1996; Lye et al., 1995). These findings support the idea that *modified extended family relations* (Litwak, 1960) are still relevant in modernized Western societies.

Our research was organized around two main goals. First, we examined how a young adult's partnership and parenthood status is related to frequency of intergenerational contact. Second, we investigated mechanisms underlying the relationship between life course status and intergenerational contact.

### *Life Course Status and Intergenerational Contact*

The young adults in our study reported seeing their parents less frequently after having entered into marriage or cohabitation. Another important finding is that face-to-face contact with parents was more frequent for young adults with offspring. Furthermore, young adult daughters with

children of their own tended to have more telephone or (e-)mail contact with their mother than young adult daughters without offspring. These findings are consistent with the family life course perspective, which contends that family relationships are related to the life course status of individual family members.

Our results differ from earlier findings among young adults (Aquilino, 1997). Whereas we found cohabitation and marriage to be negatively related to contact between young adults and parents, Aquilino's study revealed small positive effects on shared intergenerational activities. Also, whereas we found young adults' parenthood to be positively related to contact with parents, Aquilino's study found no such relationship.

The discrepancies between our findings and those of Aquilino (1997) may be partly attributable to the operationalization of intergenerational contact. We defined contact as any interaction between parent and child—whether for purposes of support, companionship, or exchange of information. In contrast, Aquilino (1997) focused more on activities eliciting positive emotions ("shared activities"), in which parents and children share enjoyable times and leisure activities. It is plausible that parenthood leads to more frequent functional contact, for instance, parents providing child care and advice. Some of these functional interactions might not be perceived as shared activities in Aquilino's sense, as grandparents' attempts to provide support may sometimes be interpreted as interference by the adult child.

The positive relationship we observed between parenthood and intergenerational contact seems to conflict with results from earlier studies (Lawton, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 1994; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). In the latter studies, however, respondents (and their children) were generally much older than in our study. Research suggests that involvement of grandparents changes with the age of the family unit: In households with young children, grandparents have a more active and caring role, whereas they are more passive in families with older children (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001). Our finding that contact is more frequent only when the youngest grandchild is below the age of 6 is consistent with this interpretation.

#### *Mechanisms Underlying Partnership and Parenthood Status*

Young adults were found to have less telephone or (e-)mail contact with their mother if they had

good relationships with their parents-in-law. Neither contact with father nor face-to-face contact with mother was related to the quality of young adults' relationships with parents-in-law. As expected, we found that frequency of face-to-face contact with mother and father was predicted by the quality of the relationship not only between the respondents and their parents, but also between the respondents' partner and the respondents' parents (i.e., the partner's parents-in-law). Furthermore, young adults tended to have less face-to-face contact with their parents when their partner reported a good relationship with the partner's own parents.

Our results suggest that contact is more frequent when parents provide child care support to their young adult children. Young adults who made use of paid child care saw their mothers less than those not using these services. These results are in line with previous findings on intergenerational support (Hogan, Eggebeen, & Clogg, 1993). Because of the cross-sectional nature of our study we are not able to identify the direction of causality of these relationships. It is possible that increased intergenerational contact is a by-product of grandparents' provision of child care yet equally possible that such provision of child care is a result of grandparents' more frequent contact with their children.

#### *Additional Factors Associated With Intergenerational Contact*

We found that young adults tend to see their mother less frequently when the latter is divorced and lives alone. Young adults reported less face-to-face contact with divorced fathers, whether the latter were currently single or remarried. In general, these results are in line with previous research (Aquilino, 1994; Kalmijn, 2007).

Death of one parent appears to have different effects on contact with surviving mothers as compared with fathers. For widowed mothers who lived alone, more frequent contact with children was observed, probably reflecting the mother's increased need for support. No such positive effects were found for father's widowhood. A possible explanation for these differences is that, in general, mothers are more involved in the lives of children than are fathers (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1990; Kalmijn, 2007); norms of reciprocity may lead children to provide more support to their mother than to their father in times of need.

Furthermore, young adults reported less frequent contact with widowed and remarried fathers; for widowed and remarried mothers, no such relationship was found. Prior research indicates that negative effects of remarriage are stronger for fathers than for mothers (Kalmijn, 2007). These differences can probably be explained by the kinkeeping role of women (Di Leonardo, 1987; Hagestad, 1986): In households, women assume responsibility for organizing family contacts, including contacts with their husband's family. Stepmothers, however, may be less involved in kinkeeping with stepchildren as compared with mothers' involvement with their own children.

### Limitations

Mechanisms thought to underlie the relationship between partnership and parenthood status and contact were tested in specific subsamples (respectively, young adults with a romantic partner and young adults with offspring). We did not explicitly test why young adults with a partner would have less contact with parents than would singles or why young adults with children would have more contact than those without children. Such analyses were not possible given the cross-sectional nature of our research design. In the future, it would be desirable to replicate our findings in a longitudinal study including measures of these mediating variables; such research could provide more direct evidence for these factors as underlying mechanisms.

In view of the low response rate in this study, results should be interpreted cautiously. Individuals with a poor relationship with their parents and—as a consequence—less frequent intergenerational contact may be underrepresented. Nevertheless, the distribution of contact frequency was in line with prior research in The Netherlands and in other Western European countries (Grundy & Shelton, 2001; Hank, 2007; Szydluk, 2000). The reader should also take into account that the study was carried out in The Netherlands, a country with a relatively high-density population. Parents and children live in relatively close geographic proximity, and differences in residential distance are relatively small. It is not clear to what extent our results can be generalized to countries with different structural characteristics.

### NOTE

This study is part of the project Status Passages and Family Ties, which is funded by the Netherlands Organization for

Scientific Research as part of the research program Family Relationships: The Ties That Bind (grant 457-03-002). It is based on data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS), which is funded through the Major Investment Fund of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research; financial and institutional support for the NKPS also comes from the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute, the Faculty of Social Sciences (Utrecht University), the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences (University of Amsterdam), and the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences (Tilburg University). We thank the participants in the NKPS seminar, the Work and Family seminar, the Social Policy, Interventions, and Integration seminar, and four anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

### REFERENCES

- Aldous, J. (1995). New views of grandparents in intergenerational context. *Journal of Family Issues*, 16, 104 – 122.
- Aquilino, W. S. (1994). Later life parental divorce and widowhood: Impact on young adults' assessment of parent-child relations. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 56, 908 – 922.
- Aquilino, W. S. (1997). From adolescent to young adult: A prospective study of parent-child relations during the transition to adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 59, 670 – 686.
- Bengtson, V. L., & Roberts, R. E. L. (1991). Intergenerational solidarity in aging families: An example of formal theory construction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 856 – 870.
- Central Bureau of Statistics Netherlands (n.d.). 1950 – 2005 *Sourcebook of birth statistics*. Retrieved November 30, 2006, from <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/mens-maatschappij/bevolking/cijfers/default.htm>
- Cooney, T. M., & Uhlenberg, P. (1990). The role of divorce in men's relations with their adult children after mid-life. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 52, 677 – 688.
- Cooney, T. M., & Uhlenberg, P. (1992). Support from parents over the life course: The adult child's perspective. *Social Forces*, 71, 63 – 84.
- De Graaf, N. D., De Graaf, P. M., & Kraaykamp, G. (2000). Parental cultural capital and educational attainment in The Netherlands: A refinement of the cultural capital perspective. *Sociology of Education*, 73, 92 – 111.
- De Leeuw, E., & De Heer, W. (2002). Trends in household survey nonresponse: A longitudinal and international comparison. In R. M. Groves, D. A. Dillman, J. E. Eltinge, & R. J. A. Little (Eds.), *Survey nonresponse* (pp. 41 – 54). New York: Wiley.

- Di Leonardo, M. (1987). The female world of cards and holidays: Women, families, and the work of kinship. *Signs*, 12, 440 – 453.
- Dykstra, P. A., Kalmijn, M., Knijn, T. C. M., Komter, A. E., Liefbroer, A. C., & Mulder, C. H. (2005). *Codebook of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study: A multi-actor, multimethod panel study on solidarity in family relationships, wave 1*. The Hague, The Netherlands: Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute.
- Elder, G. H. (1994). Time, human agency, and social change: Perspectives on the life course. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 57, 4 – 15.
- Fischer, L. R. (1981). Transitions in the mother-daughter relationship. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 43, 613 – 622.
- Fischer, L. R. (1983). Married men and their mothers. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 14, 393 – 402.
- Grundy, E., & Shelton, N. (2001). Contact between adult children and their parents in Great Britain 1986 – 99. *Environment and Planning A*, 33, 685 – 697.
- Hagestad, G. O. (1986). The family: Women and grandparents as kinkeepers. In A. Pifer & L. Bronte (Eds.), *Our aging society: Paradox and promise* (pp. 141 – 160). New York: Norton.
- Hank, K. (2007). Proximity and contacts between older parents and their children: A European comparison. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 157 – 173.
- Hogan, D. P., Eggebeen, D. J., & Clogg, C. C. (1993). The structure of intergenerational exchanges in American families. *American Journal of Sociology*, 98, 1428 – 1458.
- Kalmijn, M. (2006). Educational inequality and family relationships: Influences on contact and proximity. *European Sociological Review*, 22, 1 – 16.
- Kalmijn, M. (2007). Gender differences in the effects of divorce, widowhood, and remarriage on intergenerational support: Does marriage protect fathers? *Social Forces*, 85, 1079 – 1104.
- Kalmijn, M., & Bernasco, W. (2001). Joint and separate lifestyles in couple relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 639 – 654.
- Kaufman, G., & Uhlenberg, P. (1998). Effects of life course transitions on the quality of relationships between adult children and their parents. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 924 – 938.
- Latten, J. (2004). Trends in samenwonen en trouwen [Trends in cohabitation and marriage]. *Bevolkingstrends*, 52, 46 – 60.
- Lawton, L., Silverstein, M., & Bengtson, V. (1994). Affection, social contact, and geographic distance between adult children and their parents. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 56, 57 – 68.
- Lee, E., Spitze, G., & Logan, J. R. (2003). Social support to parents-in-law: The interplay of gender and kin hierarchies. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65, 396 – 403.
- Litwak, E. (1960). Geographic mobility and extended family cohesion. *American Sociological Review*, 25, 285 – 294.
- Logan, J. R., & Spitze, G. D. (1996). *Family ties: Enduring relations between parents and their grown children*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lye, D. N. (1996). Adult child-parent relationships. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22, 79 – 102.
- Lye, D. N., Klepinger, D. H., Hyle, P. D., & Nelson, A. (1995). Childhood living arrangements and adult children's relations with their parents. *Demography*, 32, 261 – 280.
- MacMillan, R., & Copher, R. (2005). Families in the life course: Interdependency of roles, role configurations, and pathways. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 858 – 879.
- Mancini, J. A., & Blieszner, R. (1989). Aging parents and adult children: Research themes in intergenerational relations. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51, 275 – 290.
- Parsons, T. (1954). *Essays in sociological theory*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Rossi, A. S., & Rossi, P. H. (1990). *Of human bonding: Parent-child relations across the life course*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Silverstein, M., & Bengtson, V. L. (1997). Intergenerational solidarity and the structure of adult child-parent relationships in American families. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103, 429 – 460.
- Silverstein, M., & Marengo, A. (2001). How Americans enact the grandparent role across the family life course. *Journal of Family Issues*, 22, 493 – 522.
- Szydlík, M. (2000). *Lebenslange solidarität? Generationenbeziehungen zwischen erwachsenen Kindern und Eltern* [Life-long solidarity? Generational relationships between adult children and their parents]. Opladen, Germany: Leske & Budrich.
- Tomassini, C., Kalogirou, S., Grundy, E., Fokkema, T., Martikainen, P., Broese van Groenou, M., et al. (2004). Contacts between elderly parents and their children in four European countries. *Journal of Aging*, 1, 54 – 63.
- Winship, C., & Radbill, L. (1994). Sampling weight and regression analyses. *Sociological Methods and Research*, 23, 230 – 257.